

Schooling in Borderlands: Educational Strategies of Ethnic Vietnamese Families in Cambodia

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This paper aims to better understand the educational strategies of legally and socially marginalized migrants living in borderlands. Drawing on a qualitative case study I conducted in ethnic Vietnamese communities residing along the Tonlé Sap lake in Cambodia in March and June 2017, this paper explores how stateless families in these communities anticipate their future and try to achieve their aspirations through schooling.

This research employs Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of educational strategies, with which families strategically make decisions regarding education for their children to maintain or move up their social strata (cultural reproduction). Existing research mainly cover legal migrants who at least have civil status and thus have access to public schools both in their home and host countries. In contrast, many ethnic Vietnamese families do not have access to neither Cambodian nor Vietnamese public schools due to the lack of proper documentation, although they regard Cambodian public schools as the only means by which their children can get out of statelessness and achieve social integration into Cambodian society. To ensure their future survival, children in ethnic Vietnamese communities are therefore educated in community-run schools, and are taught basic Vietnamese literacy and numeracy skills. Both Cambodian public schools and community-run schools, against families' aspirations, result in reproducing statelessness among ethnic Vietnamese children.

The strategies taken by those living outside the framework of the nation-state—such as stateless ethnic Vietnamese families in Cambodia—pose important questions regarding current educational systems, which are tightly linked to the nation-state building. These questions would help us refresh the ways we think about research and practice of international cooperation in education.